

WeHome, Episode 5 Transcript  
Big Picture People

Mena Gamil: “Just ’cause we're young, we can't talk to people who are in higher than us that think kids don't have a say. She wanted to show us that we can still fight our way and get to those people and tell them what we need in our country, 'cause we're about to be the next generation.

Erica Ciccarone (host): WeHome is a podcast about the Wedgewood-Houston and Chestnut Hill neighborhoods in Nashville, Tennessee where history, policy, people, business interests, and housing intersect in a way that says a lot about the future of Nashville. If you don't live here, you might find that the stories we uncover apply to your neighborhood, too. Each episode, we bring you on the ground to hear from a chorus of South Nashville voices. Then, two community members tour each other's lives and tell each other stories. I'm Erica Ciccarone.

Today's episode is called, “Big Picture People.”

We've reached the halfway point of the season, and thought it might be fun to hear from South Nashvillians about their favorite places in the neighborhood.

EC: Do you have a favorite spot in the neighborhood?

VARIOUS VOICES:

I love hanging out at Dozen Bakery. It is my office away from my office.

One of my favorite spots is Dozen Bakery.

One is Dozen. I like their patio space to enjoy coffee there.

Hanging out at Dozen, hanging out at the distillery behind our office is great.

I have multiple spots that I frequent: Bastion, Dozen, Smokin' Thighs.

Umm...the library on Charles E. Davis. That's like a centralized location for both communities.

It has to be Fort Negley. The top of the hill.

I do! It's at the top of Fort Negley. I just love it. It's gorgeous up there.

I also really love Fort Negley and its view of the city. It's a really fantastic kind of hidden gem here in town.

I also really love the railroad bridge that goes over Wedgewood as you enter the neighborhood. There's some graffiti in there—I guess it's buildings?—I don't know. I just really love that.

Grimey's. I love going over there, getting a cup of coffee, and while I'm drinking a cup of coffee, walk through the used records.

I really just like all the alleys. I just like going up and down those and seeing what people throw away, and what stuff is left behind, and what stuff is still there.

We like hanging on the back porch. But any other time, we just walk around.

And I like my backyard, which I've let go wild and has trees and tall grass and broken branches in it, and it feels like a little piece of the woods.

That big field, the basketball court, and behind this porch.

No doubt: Fall Hamilton Elementary School. A large scale open greenspace. It has mature trees, it has a walking trail...My husband and I and our dogs go there and walk and walk and walk and walk!

EC: In the early to mid 1900s, South Nashville was largely farmland. The Louisville and Nashville Railroad line crossed Chestnut Street with passenger and freight cars. Silos and sheds held massive quantities of grain ready to ship. No one associates Wedgewood-Houston with agriculture anymore, that is, unless you know where to look.

Betsy Littrell: This is Betsy Littrell. I'm an architect in Wedgewood-Houston and a diehard sustainability fan, and a realtor as well.

So as you can see, these are heritage breed chickens, and the feathers and the markings are just exquisite. It's like a little modern taupe-gray chicken...she's feisty. We finally got them laying in the coop. She still lays over here in the corner these beautiful little blue eggs. And there's nothing better than coming outside and getting eggs. So they're very low maintenance and fun to watch. We just sit on the back porch and look at the trees sway and chickens peck. We love having the chickens.

EC: Betsy works at Manuel Zeitlin Architects, that's the firm that houses Zeitgeist gallery that we learned about in episode one. Tucked behind modest Wedgewood-Houston house is a small—very small—urban farm.

BL: Then we've got our little compost tumbler in the corner here. It's really awesome because if there's any extra scraps, we give them to the chickens, and if the chickens don't like it, there's insects and bugs that will come and break it down, and the chickens usually like those insects and bugs. So somehow it all goes together and works to make the soil really awesome and nutrient dense. We've been passively, lazily building the soil over the past couple years, preparing for an extensive foodscaping install next year.

EC: Foodscaping is Betsy's favorite conversation topic, and she could probably make convert out of any skeptic. The practice is in line with a major permaculture principle: that what we plant in our yards and parks and along our roads should have multiple functions. A small tree could provide shade and ornamentation, feed the birds through the winter, act as a host for pollinators, filter pollution, and provide branches for weaving. Betsy looks for one more qualification: that

they're plants we can eat. Because produce can travel as much as 2,000 miles from farm to table, advocates of foodscaping envision a better way.

BL: Here we're walking to the greenhouse. This is Gina the Greena House [laughs.] She's an aquaponic greenhouse. We have about 900 gallons of water, about 150 square feet of raft space for deep water aquaponics, so you'll see we have plants growing in rafts and a 275 gallon tank with about 40 tilapia fish in there. I'm about to feed them. We feed the tilapia in the tank here and the water flows in a loop around the system with head pressure, so it's gravity flow to minimize the pumps and mechanics required to move the water. And then we distribute air via air stones to the whole system. See here, we'll feed them some fish food.

The cool thing is so we're not only growing fish and plants but most importantly we're growing bacteria, which is fascinating. They are really the workhorse of this whole system. Ultimately, the ammonia in the fish waste is food for nitrifying bacteria, which ultimately eventually convert it to nitrates, which are readily available fertilizers. One of the reasons aquaponics is exciting for the future of farming is that it uses about a tenth of the waters as conventional farming does because the water's recycled, and it grows food much faster in 40-60% of the time because the nutrients are always aqueous and readily available to the roots.

EC: She's used the greenhouse as a model to teach people in Nashville about aquaponics. Sustainable farming concepts aren't always an easy sell to the uninitiated. It can feel overwhelming to make so many changes, even to backyard gardeners. Raised to use pesticides and herbicides, we view bugs as pests and weeds as, well, weeds. It doesn't help if a source is scolding or preachy. But Betsy is not only knowledgeable and enthusiastic, but she's down to earth. Pun intended.

BL: I've done a lot of presentations about sustainability, about our green house, about food transparency and local food forests. I'm constantly "saving as" and making it a new version that I can share with different people, but I like to start that presentation out saying that I was raised on brown food from the microwave. I was a latchkey kid and I've been cooking macaroni and cheese since I was in kindergarten. My exposure to vegetables didn't happen until college with peppers and onions, but going to architecture school really fantastic education. You get a lot of the kind of high design theory and the stuff that's fun and artistic, but you really get exposed to urban planning systems, population systems of the world, and opportunities for intervention within those.

EC: And interventions, she says, can happen gradually over time—just the way they happen in nature. Just recently, she branched into real estate.

BL: I'm a newly licensed realtor. I'm excited about additional skill set as I think that I'll have a great opportunity to influence the built environment with this pairing of skills and knowledge. I'm really interested in using residential real estate realm as a test ground for different green building ideas and community ideas. I'm just starting to cook up a nd chew on some unique business ideas about how to develop more holistic housing in Nashville, so I'm excited for that. Another thing I've been really involved with the past year and a half is working to bring these food forests to bear in Middle Tennessee. I'm kind of a movement I've playfully dubbed Nomnom Nashville as my personal focus on trying to incorporate edible and productive landscapes in the public and private realm. But as this has taken shape over time it has started to fold other key players into the movement. My good buddy Jeremy Lekich with Nashville Foodscapes, and I set out to start advocacy group which has grown into a multi-member group. We're calling ourselves the Food Forest Advocates of Middle Tennessee. We have a pilot project that we have with Farm and the City. This is an existing community garden outside of John Henry Hale homes off of Charlotte Pike. We want to introduce new perennial useful edible foodscape on this property. We're working with existing gardeners there and excited to engage some of the Oasis youth in their different programs in this project over time and help expose to design thinking and ultimately food forest design. Our hope is that this advocacy group can serve as a resource for communities to develop similar projects in their neighborhoods. As these types of ideas start popping up, they'll be very valuable to the neighborhood. One of the ones I have in my head for Wedgewood-Houston is a community foodscape here at Fall Hamilton Elementary. So it's just a matter of time of circling back to that opportunity, and the principal is very receptive, and I know that I'm committed to the neighborhood long term along with other people. And that's something I see in the future for sure.

EC: Betsy's work with Nashville Foodscapes and Food Forest Advocates of Middle Tennessee is what brought us together for this episode. Last summer, she participated in a design charrette with Nashville Civic Design Center, and she met two teenagers in the center's Design Your Neighborhood program. It's a paid internship for high school students who are interested in learning how neighborhood design can spur social change. Interns meet with design pros like architects and engineers, as well as local political leaders; and they work on a series of community design projects.

Mena Gamil and Makarious Mesak got the center's attention with a project they completed at LEAD Academy in Chestnut Hill. They were invited to apply to Design Your Neighborhood. Betsy sat down with the teens to get the details.

Makarious Mesak: Well hello there. My name is Makarious. I'm from Egypt, and I came here three years ago. And my other partner is...

Mena Gamil: I'm Mena. I came to the U.S. 8 or 9 years ago, and I'm also from Egypt. I go LEAD Academy.

MM: I go to Stewart's Creek High School, and we're both sophomores. It all started with our freshman seminar class. It was Ms. Garza's class, and she just gave us three assignments we could do: it was housing, gentrification, or sidewalks. I was actually in housing, and Mena was in sidewalks. He and his friend came with this idea of solar paneled sidewalks. Everyone did a presentation on their own, and the whole class voted one presentation. Whoever's presentation was picked was going to be leader and is going to be the main topic.

BL: What do you think was the reasoning for your teacher giving you these assignments and these options?

MG: Ms Garza started his project because she wanted to show us that we had a voice. All that political stuff going on, and she wanted to show us that even though we're young, we had a word in our country and our community. We can get the word out. Just 'cause we're young, we can't talk to people who are in higher than us that think kids don't have a say. She wanted to show us that we can still fight our way and get to those people and tell them what we need in our country, 'cause we're about to be the next generation.

Our community that the school is in, Chestnut Hill, needed a lot of work. The city wasn't looking after it. We were trying to get word out to mayor or to anyone else that was running the city that would listen to us that Chestnut Hill needs work. The sidewalks need to be improved, the housing need to be improved and whole bunch of stuff. They didn't put money into it and try to help it like every community around there or somewhere else.

EC: LEAD Academy is located on 1st Avenue in the old Cameron School building. Named for a Fisk-educated science teacher who was killed in World War I, the school goes way back in Nashville and Chestnut Hill. Here's Makarious and Mena's teacher in an interview with Nashville Civic Design Center.

LIZETTE GARZA: Hi, my name is Lizette Garza, and I teach freshman seminar here at LEAD Academy High School. If I could track these kids for the next four or five years, I will tell you that you are going to see so much activism in them. The ability for them to understand that their actions and that designing and planning is so connected to quality of life is crazy. Some people even in college and their adult lives don't feel that sense of connection to, "I can do something to change that" or "This is actually very much human-planned. The fact that these situations exist, the concentration of poverty, all these different things were created by humans by planning by leadership, and all these different systems are in place." They get to know that at

such a young age, at 14 or 15 years old. A lot of the students felt really passionate about issues, even from streets and sidewalks, which I wasn't sure if they were going to feel really connected to that. But they were. They were invested in like, "This is our community. This is how people get around." Being able to see that as we went on a walking tour of the neighborhood, they were able to really understand how it affects everyday human life.

MG: We were trying to find projects, each person has their own project and presentation. At the end we would present. A lot of people voted for me, and I became leader of project. We divided into four or three sections, one was research, the second was social media and getting into contact with people, third one was materials we'd use for solar panel sidewalks that happened in other countries, and we wanted to bring it to Nashville.

MM: There was also a funding group that was trying to get money so we could buy the materials.

MG: We had really small solar panels that got donated to us that powered a light bulb to give us an example of how it would be outside if it was on the actual street. Ms. Garza made a bigger project that would present to people from the community. They would come to our school and look at our projects, give us add-ons, ways to help us and things like that.

BL: Wow. That sounds like an awesome project that you spent a lot of time putting together. I'd love to know how you guys felt about the project when it first began and how you thought about the assignment and what you thought you might learn, and how that changed as you progressed in the assignment and meeting different people in the community.

MG: The quarter was about to be over, so whatever grade you can get so you can pass that class, that's what most students are reaching for. It's the end of the semester, everybody wants to finish with good grades, so that's what we were trying to do.

MM: But then when we saw people were actually interested in it and we invited them over to see our presentation, our model, it felt like it's going to be something bigger than we thought. Me and Mena continued on. We went to the internship, which Design Your Neighborhood with Nashville Civic Design Center.

MG: Ms. Gibson who is in the Nashville Civic Design Center wanted us to be part of the internship and also go present at Pecha Kucha.

MM: Pecha Kucha.

MG: Something like that.

[Tape of PECHA KUCHA presentation] MG: Hello, my name is Mena, this is Eshak, Makarious, Juan, and Michael. Our project is about solar paneled sidewalks. In school, we started talking about a way we can find something in the community to help how our community's developed, to help everything in our community: water, people, trees, so we came up with solar sidewalks.

EC: Pecha Kucha is a presentation method that's popular among designers and architects—but it's used by pretty much every medium now. They've sprung up in 1000 cities, according to the website, and claim a kind of democratic method of delivering information, where people can share their ideas regardless of the professional or social stature.

MG: When we went there we didn't know anybody, we were four teenagers with everyone else adults. We knew that a lot of kids or teenagers in the city, they don't get the word out, a lot of people don't take their word, so it was nerve wracking for us to go.

MM: We were the first teenagers to go ever there, so when they said that it made us a little bit more nervous. Also every slide is 20 seconds. There was a lot of information we wanted to say, but 20 seconds is not that much to say, and there's some slides that are some slides are short and you have like 5 or 6 extra seconds, and that can be really awkward [laughs.]

MG: And sometimes you forget the stuff. You have it on the notecard you forget it.

[Tape of PECHA KUCHA presentation] MM: So a 2,000 square foot house would take around 4000 watts. We can measure that by two watts for every one square foot. A typical solar panel can produce around 250 watts an hour if it's sunny outside. Solar panels can last up to 25 years. As you can see, it was 100% that they just went to decrease 10-15% after 25 years, which is perfect.

EC: The teens break down their project piece by piece: the finances needed, the jobs it could create, the electrical wattage used in average houses and the dollars that can be saved by solar energy. They knew about the life of panels, how technological advances have changed them, and what safety features are coming down the pike. In other words, they did their research.

What struck me throughout the conversation was how often the boys returned to the WHY of Ms. Garza's assignment: they had really internalized it.

MM: When she made the project she made us know that we have a voice in the community and we can change something as teenagers. So it's improving our future as well because there's a lot of adults that don't think their voices can be heard. But when you learn at school in a class like that, you're going to be talking always and reaching to people out and trying to help your community. When me and Mena went to the internship, we got more knowledge about it. We went to different neighborhoods, we looked at different people, we looked at seniors, teens, children.

MG: Every community's different, each has something different. It depends on community.

BL: What did you learn communities need? Can you give an example of a particular community and what they needed, or just general areas of community design that you learned about?

MG: I learned that some communities needed a park. Even though there's an open field for people to go, a lot of people don't go because there's not swings, slides, or anything to pull them there, and there isn't a track to run around.

MM: There were also some neighborhoods that didn't have grocery stores near them. That was a problem because they'd have to drive a long time in their car. Most of the time when someone goes shopping, it will a single person and they get their own car instead of using transportation. We thought about that as well, that we could build more grocery stores nearby an area, so they can just walk, bike there. The solar panels would help for safer walkability. Also, solar panels will help with global warming because most of our power is coming from nuclear plants and fossil fuels.

MG: The sidewalks can help make Nashville the greenest city in the South because there's going to be less pollution, like Makarious said. You won't have to get a lot of trucks out to transport cement and stay out there for a really long time. They're easy to put in and take out. Even if it breaks, it's just one man thing. It's going to help with affordability because you wouldn't have to pay electricity. That money you'd use for electricity, you can give it to your kids to go to college, buy the car that you need to get to places. Get the house that you need and pay off the stuff that you need to pay off. If you have these sidewalks, everyone is going to know it's safe. It has LEDs so you can make it colorful, and people will want to run on it because it's welcoming. It's not just a normal pavement sidewalk. It's something new. It attracts people.

MM: When it's snowing, it heats up so it can melt the snow and then drain water into a small river or small pond in a park, which can help walkability during the winter. It's also going to

make people exercise more because who wouldn't want to walk on a solar panel? We know that it can be possible because we did research on Netherlands that has biking road we know it can be possibility. They do the same thing: drain water out and everything like that.

MG: Some of the water that they save for the rain and snow can be used in the summer to cool off the sidewalks.

BL: I love all of the depth of thought you've put into the project, and you've spent a lot of time thinking about this system and learning how it can integrate into the community. Obviously you've met a lot of different adults in the city doing different things. Can you talk about how you're going to take the forward into your future?

MM: We also met the people at Nashville Foodscapes. They taught us about gardening and stuff. It made us think more about green around the solar panels so we can put food forests in parks and people can go grab an apple or orange or anything they want to eat.

BL: I love food forests. Myself and Jeremy Lekich and Nashville Food Forests came and took you on a site visit. It was so much fun to get to show you that, and it warmed my heart and made me so happy to see you guys incorporating that into your own personal projects. You spoke a little about how park goers could eat an apple when they go, but do you have family and friends that this could change their life, having parks that you can eat?

MM: It would change me honestly because I don't eat a lot of fruits at home. When you see free food, you just want to eat it. I don't know why anyone is like that.

MG: it's free! It's expensive to buy healthy food. If you're running instead of eating a non-healthy snack, you can grab a free apple off the tree, a peach or something like that. Just eat it. It's free and it's healthy. You don't have to go to school to buy chips or processed foods that would damage your body. A community forest would also bring community together. People will start knowing each other and working together on that forest. It's gonna help the neighborhood become one instead of people just staying at home. They're gonna become one. They're gonna know each other. They're gonna know who's who. It's gonna be a whole big family.

BL: What are some of the positive community outputs from people knowing each other more closely? What are some problems that may be fixed?

MM: There's gonna be probably less crime. People would go outside more instead of staying in the house. They're going to be like, "Hey neighbor!" or whatever they'll say. They'll go outside and talk to them and have a good time and help each other if someone has a problem.

MG: If one of the neighbors have a broken down car or something that got broken down because of a storm, the whole community is going to come together to help rebuild it or fix it. They're basically a family after doing that project that they're doing in the forest. They're gonna have community meetings. They're probably going to have a lot more time outside, go to each other's houses, become really close friends. If one is looking for job, they can find each other jobs. It's going to be one huge family.

MM: I used to live in a neighborhood and didn't know a lot of neighbors around me. I just moved to a new house and people are really nice to me. I really like it there. I feel more closer to them because they came to me and wanted to know me. When I used to live in an apartment, I didn't know anybody. No one would come, no one would visit, I didn't know any kids. It made me not go outside, but now I would like to go outside more often because I know more people around me.

BL: How do you guys see this influencing your future? What type of jobs do you think you want to learn more about?

MG: I'm interested in studying physics, calculus, I really like math and want to be a structural engineer.

MG: I feel architecture has grabbed my atten really hard. I want to also explore the world and travel a lot other countries to build things. I want to go to college, maybe wait a year and explore the world. Then go to college.

MM: Me too. I want to explore the world as well.

BL: I want to know a little bit about Egypt. I've never been to Egypt. Can you talk about how communities are designed there and maybe some things that you guys do better there that you'd like to see in the U.S., or maybe some things that you think our communities are better at here? How can we put these two countries together?

MM: My building that we used to be living in was two bedroom apartment. It was my whole family, like my aunt on fourth floor and I lived on the third floor. It's a family building that my great grandfather built. As soon as I got bored I could go to my aunt or my cousins. That's what I like about Egypt. Most people live in same household.

MG: I don't think American works smarter, it works harder cause they're using stuff out of wood, you know if a storm comes by it's gonna knock it down. It's a piece of cake.

MM: What, they don't have bricks?

MG: Yeah, no bricks, it's not gonna do it. But if you build it and keep it for generations like our great grandparents taught us, you want to build something that will last forever.

MM: When I used to live in Egypt, it was safe. It wasn't the safest, but it was safe. Now it's not really safe because of what's happening and the terrorists and stuff, but we had a good life. I used to know everyone around me. We used to go outside and stay all night until 12 in the morning. If there was no school, I'd stay till like one in the morning actually.

EC: Here's something else about Betsy: A big part of why she wanted to interview Mena and Makarios has to do with her own youth—and how architecture and design became a way out.

BL: My family moved to Middle Tennessee in 1995. My father came here for work. It was rural Middle Tennessee, so I didn't move until Nashville proper until 2010. I was curious, when you meet people where you like it or not, you think about what they've been through, what they've done. It's interesting to ask what did you think I've been through or done before I got to here. If you wrote a story about my past, what do you think it would be?

MM: I would say you grew in an average household. You might have known your neighbors, but I don't think there were a lot of kids around you. I would say that you tried to go outside and bike.

MG: Yeah probably because she has the helmet.

BL: That's pretty good. Luckily enough, my father's been a cyclist so he's been riding bikes most of my life. He was always the weird guy in shorts with the helmet riding around. When we came to Tennessee, everyone rural. It was mostly white people. It was really sad. We showed up to school that day and we were like, "Oh my goodness. What are we getting into?" It's beautiful up there, and there's plenty of great folks up there, but it was a culture shock because it was not very progressive. A lot of folks were very closed minded, but I valued being in the environment because it helped me understand the people's motivations. I feel like I have ears to hear. I don't agree with much of what they have to say, but if you want to help change the conversation you have to have a little bit of understanding to have an entry point. When we moved, it was important to my parents that we could walk to school and bike to school. I had a bike would bike around. I didn't really bike as much there because I came in sixth grade, and it wasn't very cool to

ride your bike. But it didn't take very long for me to not care about that because riding bikes is a ton of fun. Now I love being older and riding my bike. It's so fun. You get there faster. You get to meet people in the way. It's faster than walking but slower than a car, so it's a really good way to experience the city. I love wearing my helmet, and waving to young people so they know they can wear their helmet and be safe, too. And still be cool.

MG: Yeah, you have to wear your helmet.

BL: My parents both nurses. My dad worked at a concrete plant. When he found out he was having kids, he went back to school for that. I had a working class family, as with most folks, life can be hard. My family had a dark period. I had a dark high school period. Everything went really down, low point. But I was able to pull myself out by my bootstraps. My dad knew I was meant for more than I had grown into in Greenbriar. I ripped myself out of that, worked in a hospital for a few years, then went back to college, I would work the night shift and made my own college to take the ACT and did community college. Eventually I found architecture for a career. I didn't think I wanted to be there my whole life, but it was escaping the past that led me to architecture. I've since graduated and began working at the Civic Design Center. I see all the good that design can bring, do good reach out engage youth so they know what they can do and avoid other lost youth.

I'm curious what your immediate friends and family have to say and how they feel about the things you're learning. Are you telling them about the things you're learning? I know both of your families are Egyptian. How do they feel about some of these concepts in American communities?

MG: My parents moved here so I can get an education. work hard every single day so they can provide me I can grow up and become something they want to be proud of me. When I'm doing this, I feel like I'm paying off my parents just a little bit of the debt since they came here. They didn't know anybody. They came as strangers to the U.S. They left their whole family behind. My mom and dad's parents, one on each side died, and it was heartbreaking they they couldn't spend a long time with them. They sacrificed their whole family and their parents and their whole lives, jobs, everything they loved to do to in their country, to come here to provide us with a better education and better living.

MM: Same thing for my parents. I do talk to them about what I'm doing now, but it's hard for them to understand it. They're not from this generation, so they don't really understand technology. They didn't finish school; they didn't go to college in Egypt, so it's hard for them to understand. But it's my job to make them understand and help them in everything because they

did the same thing Mena's did. They took me here so I can get an education, and they work hard every day for me. I do the same thing for them. I gotta work hard for them.

BL: You guys are amazing. We're in tears over here. What do you feel—obviously, you guys had a wonderful teacher that helped start this whole process for you guys. Clearly the world's a big world with a lot of people in it and a lot of youth. What are some of the ideas you have to engage other young folks and let them know that they're important, that their voice is important. How do you ultimately meet them where they're at but bring them along to help them help us, help the world?

MM: I think if you wanna engage other teens, if you're a teen and hearing this you should share it with your friends first of all, so we have more people and see if they agree with us, so we can know if it's a good idea that people would like and mostly teenagers because we're teenagers as well and we're the next generation like we say.

MG: I think anything is possible. You can do whatever you want. Just go by steps, research, talk to people, engagements in your community. You can do whatever you want in the world. Keep on following your dreams. Don't even sleep. You don't have dreams; put them as goals. It becomes your life.

MM: You just gotta be courageous, be that first weird guy that starts it out, but then someone else joins you. It's gonna be a great group of people that joins you.

MG: If we can do it, you can do it, and you probably can do better.

MM: Yup.

BL: That's awesome.

MM: Shout out to Michael, Khalil, Esha, and Juan. They're part of our group. And shout out to Ms. Garza and the whole classroom. And the internship. Everything.

BL: Shout out Egypt. Can you say that in Arabic?

MM: [laughs] I don't know how to say "shout out" in Arabic.

MM: Keep on looking for us. We'll come up somewhere.

BL: Yeah! There you go!

EC: I'm not going to lie. Betsy and I may have both cried a little during the interview, and after it. Once we recovered, we sat down to talk one-on-one.

EC: So Betsy, what are you thinking after talking to Mena and Makarius?

BL: I am feeling very happy, head in the clouds right now. Just a heartwarming situation to have met those young men weeks back and seen that spark and drive in them, and knowing about this podcast, wanting to help encourage their journey through life and in chasing down big ideas by helping them get on the podcast. The fact that we just finished the interview, it's a very heartwarming and fulfilling day.

EC: How do you see young people fitting into sustainability in Nashville, the future of the city?

BL: I think they're really gonna be some of the trailblazers for movement. I have personally kind of decided that I want to help focus on youth instead of rocking up against the brick walls of old people that are set in their ways, just focus on the young people that have ears to hear and aren't so cynical and still daydream and have ideas about life and how to better the environment and other people's lives as well. I am very excited by youth to help usher in the larger movement of sustainability.

EC: Anything else to say about your work about the solar sidewalks project that we learned about today?

BL: I think the big idea from today was about ideas and just how you can have a sparked idea, and you really need to honor that. Chase it down, trust your gut, and give them the time and energy that they deserve. Over time, they will flourish, and you'll meet new people, and they'll connect you with different people with different ideas. The solar sidewalks, it was so refreshing to see young people excited about a sustainability project that would absolutely add to the quality of the built environment. That to me is an example of how a whole bunch of different ideas are needed, and they need to work together, to create a better life. So that's the biggest takeaway from me is to honor your ideas and chase 'em down and tell 'em to people, and see where they take you.

EC: Thank you Mena, Makarious, and Betsy for sharing your enthusiasm and knowledge. Thanks to Nashville Civic Design Center for letting us use their recordings of Ms. Garza's interview and Pecha Kucha, Pecha Kucha, whatever.

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We record our interviews at Nashville Public Television. Please check out their awesome video series, A Word on Words, where authors talk to authors about all topics literary. Find it at [awordonwords.org](http://awordonwords.org). BURNAWAY is an awesome contemporary art magazine, and they're helping us spread the word about South Nashville. Read their reviews, news, and interviews at [burnaway.org](http://burnaway.org).

Lauren Cierzan illustrates every episode at [www.wehome.org](http://www.wehome.org). If you like us, please show some love with an iTunes review. We're also on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram at @WeHomePodcast.

Next time, we'll hear from an unlikely pair: an affordable housing activist and a developer. Don't miss it. I'm Erica Ciccarone. Thanks for listening.

BL: It's basically a huge yard of neglect and zeal. [laughs]

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